



February 23, 2011

Testimony in support of:

S.B. No. 932 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEFINITION OF SEVERE NEED SCHOOL FOR PURPOSES OF THE SCHOOL BREAKFAST GRANT PROGRAM

Good Afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleishman and members of the Education Committee. My name is Dawn Crayco and I am the Deputy Director for End Hunger Connecticut! Inc. The goal of EHC! is to decrease the levels of hunger, food insecurity and poor nutrition in our state. I am here today to testify in favor of **S.B. 932: An Act Concerning the Definition of Severe Need School for Purposes of the School Breakfast Grant Program**. It's clear the purpose of this bill is to increase participation in the federal School Breakfast Program, however we would propose some suggested changes to make the bill more moderate and applicable to its intent.

The School Breakfast Program (SBP) is administered federally by the Food and Nutrition Service of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). At the state level it is administered by the Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE) and is operated by school food service authorities in local schools. Schools that choose to run the program are reimbursed by the federal government for meals served to students.

End Hunger CT! is a member the state school breakfast task force Connecticut School Breakfast Expansion Team, or CBET. Members of the group include the State Department of Education, School Nutrition Association of Connecticut, New England Dairy and Food Council, and Connecticut Action for Healthy Kids. Together through promotion, marketing, and one-on-one district assistance we assisted 60 new schools in participating in the School Breakfast Program.

Evidence consistency points to the fact that breakfast is a fundamental part of a healthy diet for any children, but even more so for low income children whose nutritional status can be compromised. Additionally, offering a school breakfast is also linked to lower levels of absenteeism and visits to the nurse as well as higher levels of academic performance.

Connecticut offers a small, per breakfast reimbursement depending on available funds, and grants to "severe need" schools offering SBP. A "severe need" school is defined as a school where, in the second prior year, 40% or more of the students received lunches at a free or reduced-price. Often, depending on the level of participation in the program, the federal reimbursement often does not provide enough for school to cover their costs; this extra funding

allows them to do so and thereby encourages schools with higher need and low-income students to offer school breakfast.

Connecticut needs stronger legislation to ensure more schools participate in School Breakfast. In 2010, for the fifth consecutive year, Connecticut ranked last in the nation in the number of schools participating in the federally funded school breakfast program. Unacceptably, only about half of our schools that serve lunch also serve breakfast. In 2009-2010, 26 states had more than 90% of their schools serving breakfast. That included our neighbors Vermont and Rhode Island with a 92.9% and 100% participation rate, respectively.

This legislation aims at strengthening Connecticut's state of school breakfast participation but would be more effective and less costly with some changes. By provision in the proposed legislation:

- (1) The reimbursement rate per meal established by the United States Secretary of Agriculture is insufficient to cover the costs of the school's breakfast programs.

There are schools that operate financially efficient breakfast programs. As written, this would hold this against them. We propose removing this section.

- (2) The school is participating, or is about to participate in a breakfast program

The words "breakfast program" should be replaced with [School Breakfast Program] so that we are referencing the federal program with nutritional guidelines and not any item sold in a school in the morning hours.

- (3) Twenty percent or more of the breakfast served to students at the school in the fiscal year two years prior to the grant year were served free or at reduced price.

The current federal definition of "severe need" is based on lunches served (in the fiscal year two years prior) not "breakfasts served". Because districts serve many more free and reduced price breakfast than paid breakfast, this as written could make every school breakfast program eligible for grant funds and make funds less available for districts with among the highest low-income students. We proposed keeping the existing "severe need" definition of comparing to lunch but move the percentage from 40% to 20%.

Additionally, we believe there are other ways we can increase school breakfast participation in Connecticut by using resources already in place. In 2006, the Connecticut legislature created a successful In-Classroom Breakfast Grant Program. This program, funded at \$50,000, provides funds for severe-need schools to bring breakfast in the classroom which has proven to be a highly effective way of increasing access to the meal and ultimately increasing participation (see chart on last page). If the requirement for a school to be severe-need was removed from this

language, all schools would be eligible for these funds and able to pilot an in-classroom breakfast program as a foot in the door to creating a sustainable and thriving breakfast operation.

The replacement language would read:

Connecticut General Statute (C.G.S.) 10-215g is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof:

(a) There is established an In-Classroom School Breakfast Pilot Program. The Department of Education may, within available appropriations, maintain a competitive grant program for the purpose of assisting up to ten [severe need] schools, as defined by federal law governing school nutrition programs, to establish in-classroom school breakfast programs.

We commend the intention efforts of S.B. 932 in encouraging school participation in School Breakfast but we would recommend the changes previously suggested for a bill better aligned with our current fiscal situation and still in pursuit of a Connecticut where all children have access to a nutritious breakfast.

The graph below shows the impact of additional students fed with in-classroom breakfast as a result of the Pilot In-Classroom School Breakfast Grants. All three school districts have expanded in-classroom to other if not all schools due to the continued positive outcomes in classroom behavior, tardiness, and focused learning.

